

History and Memory Issues: A Comparative Study of The Treatment of The Colonial Period in France And Japan

Valérie Niquet *

Abstract

Japan and France share similar experiences as former colonial powers. Both are confronted with the similar kinds of complex issues concerning history, education, and also share memories of conflict with their former colonized countries.

However, whereas heated debates on these issues are accepted as “normal” in France, there is little understanding of the similarities with Japan, maintained in its status of extreme “otherness”; and an uncritical acceptance of mainstream positions dominated by the PRC’s official discourse. This paper’s objective is to analyze that difference of attitude regarding Japan and France “historical culpability”, and better understand its motivation, that play an important role in the perception of Japan 70 years after the end of the second world war.

Introduction

As former colonial powers, France and Japan do face similar historical and memorial issues concerning colonization and the wars carried out by Paris and Tokyo in North Africa, Indochina, the Korean peninsula or China. In the case of France, the relationship with Algeria remains complex, and affects the treatment of the colonial period and decolonization, as well as the debates surrounding this treatment. In the case of Japan, 70 years after the end of the Second World War and the end of Japanese colonization in Asia, the issue is paradoxically becoming increasingly important in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and in Korea, for different reasons that we will analyze.

In spite of that similarity however, the position of many Western analysts or political actors regarding today’s Japan remains often partial, and the legitimacy of the debates that also exist in the archipelago on the questions of history and memory - very similar to those that have developed in France since the introduction of memorial laws at the beginning of the 1990s - is rejected.¹

It is also striking to note that, on very specific subjects, such as the comfort women issue in Asia, and the military prostitution (bordels militaires de campagne or BMC) organized by

* Valérie Niquet is the head of the Asia Department at Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, Senior Visiting Fellow, the Japan Institute of International Affairs

¹ For instance, in 2015, the Open Letter in Support of Historians in Japan “to express our unity with the many courageous historians in Japan seeking an accurate and just history of World War II” on https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/Contributed-files/japan-scholars-statement-2015.5.4-eng_0.pdf. The same historians did not express the same support for the “courageous historians in the PRC or in Korea” who try to work on the same issues but do not blindly follow the official position of their governments.

the army in French colonies or elsewhere, there is a constant determination to establish a fundamental distinction between two practices that are, indeed, very similar. Yet it is in France, rather than in Japan, that a certain romanticism of the colonial period has been preserved, if one thinks of movies like “Pépé le Moko”, or songs like “Ma tonkinoise” or “La fille du Bédouin”, that remain even today objects of amusement rather than of condemnation.²

The question, therefore, is to understand why there is this difference of attitude that makes Japan a more “guilty” culprit, condemned to an eternal ostracism. The issue of apologies, and the difficulties in accepting the reality of the abuses committed in China and South Korea by the Imperial Army, is often mentioned. We shall see however that, if these issues are legitimate, they are also not specific to Japan. On the other hand, the questions raised by the often-indiscriminate acceptance of the theses disseminated by the PRC or by some actors in South Korean society, are seldom confronted, in spite of the fact that in both these countries, to different degrees, the production of historical discourse remains under the exclusive control of political authorities.³

One can also conceive that, to former colonial powers such as France, but also the United Kingdom, the Netherlands or even the United States, there is a comfort in having in Japan a “guiltier”, and moreover a non-Western and “exotic” culprit, which relativizes these countries’ own experiences as colonial oppressors, despite very similar experiences.

France and Japan were also confronted, after 1945 for Japan and after the end of the Algerian war for France, to the same imperative of national reconciliation, which justified the occultation of the memory of the most controversial historical episodes. The objective was to rebuild the nation and the legitimacy of the powers in place, in the context of the Cold War, by “ignoring” the past. In France, the purpose of the Amnesty Act of 1968, was indeed to prohibit any search for responsibility for the abuses committed during the Algerian war, in the name of reconciliation and the unity of the nation.⁴

The Controversies about Memorial Laws in France

France has adopted, since the early 1990s, four “memorial” laws.⁵ The first one, the Gayssot Act in 1990 provides for the punishment of those who deny the existence of crimes against humanity and genocide. The objective of the Gayssot Act was to provide the legal means to control a burgeoning negationist movement that denied the existence of concentration camps and genocide. Later, the 2001 Taubira Act stated that “the French Republic recognizes that the transatlantic slave trade as well as in the Indian Ocean from the 15th century onwards, and slavery, constitute a crime against humanity”. The law also called for “educational and research programs to give the slave trade and slavery the place they deserve”.

When the memorial laws were adopted, that were supposed to address a lack of interest in these issues, a counter-argument emerged to denounce the popular belief that colonial history

² “Pépé le Moko”, Julien Duvivier, 1937 ; “Ma petite tonkinoise”, 1906 ; “La fille du Bédouin”, 1927.

³ The question of historical taboos in the PRC, where the regime is responsible for over 35 million deaths since 1949, rarely comes up in Western countries. Similarly, no statue commemorating the martyrdom of “comfort women” has been erected in front of the United States Embassy in Seoul, in spite of the fact that prostitution of Korean women at the service of American soldiers was authorized and officially organized after the Korean War until the 1980s. See Katherine Moon, *Sex Among Allies 1960-1980, Military Prostitution in US-Korea Relations*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997.

⁴ Loi n° 68-697 du 31 juillet 1968 portant amnistie, JORF, O2 août 1968, p. 7521, on <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000693181> , the same pattern occurred in France after the second world war, with a long period of obliteration of the French State and administration collaboration and responsibility in the genocide.

⁵ The four memorial laws are: the Gayssot Act of July 13, 1990, the Armenian Genocide Recognition Act of January 29, 2001, the Taubira Act of May 21, 2001 and the Mekachera Act of February 23, 2005.

remained taboo. In fact, particularly since the 1980s, there was an abundance of production on French colonial history, including its most controversial aspects such as the use of torture during the Algerian War.⁶ The most famous work of Henri Alleg on the torture in Algeria had been widely circulated since its publication in 1958 in spite of its official interdiction, and the book by Yves Courrière on the history of the Algerian War was published in 1968, less than six years after the end of the war.⁷

The debate around these memorial laws in France also focused on the relations between historical research and political and moral standards. The purpose of the memorial laws, and more particularly of the Taubira Act, was to officially recognize the culpability of France as a colonial and slave country, but even more to repent for the difficult integration of migrant populations into French society since the end of the Algerian War. One of the issues raised by the Taubira Act in the debate that followed its adoption was that, by mentioning the temporal limit of the 15th century, it focused exclusively on French or Western culpability and excluded intra-African slave trade and the role of Arab traffickers from its field of condemnation.⁸

A connection can indeed be established between the adoption of these memorial laws and contemporary social and political issues in France, where a large migrant community of African or North African origin who are still confronted with integration difficulties despite becoming French nationals, do exist.⁹ The vote-seeking dimension of the initiative - which has long benefited political parties on the left side of the political spectrum - obviously played a role in the promotion of these memorial laws.¹⁰ This motivation is not significant in Japan, where the demography of descendants from former colonized populations is very different.¹¹

The Influence of Liberal History in Japan

In Japan, the questions of history and memory, and the teaching of the colonial period and the Second World War, have also been influenced by the post-World War II democratization movement, with the adoption of the Fundamental Law of Education in 1947. From the 1960s, the influence of progressive journalists and historians and of teachers' unions, hostile to the United States and to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that dominated post-war political life, gradually became predominant. The issues of education, of the authorization of textbooks, and of the memory of the colonial period and of the Second World War in Asia, thus also became part of an internal political struggle involving the Japan Socialist Party and the Japanese Communist Party in the context of an ideologically virulent Cold War in Asia.

It was in Japan, therefore, that these issues were raised, far before they became significant

⁶ Romain Bertrand, *Mémoires d'Empire, la controverse autour du fait colonial*, Editions du Croquant, Broissieux, 2006 et Romain Bertrand, Jean Chesneaux, Michel Jiraud, Thomas Loué, « Les temps de la mémoire coloniale entre production d'un savoir scientifique et espace public de la controverse », *Temporalités*, 5.2006.

⁷ Henri Alleg, *La question*, Editions de Minuit, Paris 1958 ; Yves Courrière, *La guerre d'Algérie, Volume 1, 1954-1957, Volume 2, 1957-1962*, Fayard, Paris, 2001 (reprint) ; *Les débats autour de la guerre d'Algérie à travers le journal le Monde*, Maîtrise d'histoire contemporaine, Université de Bordeaux III, 2001.

⁸ Gilles Manceron, « Sur quelle base aborder le débat sur la loi, la mémoire et l'histoire? », *Tracées*, 09-2009 sur <http://traces.revues.org>

⁹ In 2005, urban riots erupted in French suburbs with a large population of migrant origin. The same year, the movement "Les indigènes de la République" was also launched. See Romain Bertrand, op.cit.

¹⁰ In 2012, François Hollande won 86% of the Muslim vote. *Le vote des musulmans à l'élection présidentielle*, IFOP, sur http://www.ifop.fr/media/pressdocument/482-1-document_file.pdf

¹¹ The number of *Zainichi Koreans* in Japan is about 800,000, whereas in France, the number of migrants of Muslim origin is estimated to represent almost 10% of the population. Most of them have dual nationality and the right to vote.

issues in China or in Korea. In the 1970s, Honda Katsuichi, a journalist with the *Asahi Shimbun*, visited China and published a series of articles on Japan's war crimes. Similarly, in the 1980s and 1990s, the *Asahi Shimbun* regularly referred to the “testimony” of Seiji Yoshida on his “hunts for comfort women” before retracting in 2014 all stories quoting this “testimony” that happened to be fabricated.¹²

Actually, the Japanese government fell in line with the movement and, in 1982, after a protest from Beijing regarding possible amendment of the vocabulary used in textbooks to qualify the Japanese offensive in China in 1937, the Japanese government adopted a “Respect for neighbouring countries” (近隣諸国条項 *kinrin shokoku joukou*) clause, still in force today, which requires textbook authors to take into account the feelings of neighbouring Asian countries on historical issues.¹³

Contrary to popular belief, numerous works have been published in Japan on controversial issues, as early as the 1960s, on the colonial period and the Second World War. For instance, 21 articles on the sole issue of “comfort women” (慰安婦 *ianfu*) were published in Japan before 1988, while during the same period, only one article was published on this issue in the Republic of Korea (South Korea).¹⁴

The Debate in France and in Japan on the Rights of the Historian

Indeed, confronted with the same type of memorial issues, France and Japan have also experienced the same controversies concerning the control of historical narrative at the service of political or strategic considerations.

In France, one of the consequences of the adoption of the memorial laws has been the creation in 2005 of the movement “Liberté pour l'histoire”, following an open letter published in the newspaper *Libération* on December 13, 2005.¹⁵ A wide debate also developed in the media on the concept of “national history”. For the association “Liberté pour l'histoire”, opposed to memorial laws and the intervention of the Parliament in the work of historians, whose counter-model was that of the control of the historical narrative in the Soviet Union and more generally in totalitarian regimes, “Historians cannot accept any limitations to their research”. The “Comité de vigilance face aux usages publics de l'histoire”, established in 2005 by Gérard Noiriel, an historian working on immigration in France, also disputes the use of history for political objectives.¹⁶

Moreover, the Mekachera Act of February 23, 2005, was also a reaction against prior memorial laws, perceived as negative for the construction of a more positive national narrative that could play a role in facilitating the integration of migrant-origin populations.

In other words, France also developed its own debate on the “masochistic characteristic” of history teaching in high schools. The Mekachera Act called for high school programs to “also present the positive role of colonization”, deploring the fact that school curricula did not

¹² Reiji Yoshida, “Asahi Shimbun Admits Errors in Past ‘Comfort Women’ Stories”, *Japan Times*, August 5, 2014.

¹³ Ibid. Beijing had protested against the change, reported by the *Asahi Shimbun*, of the term “invasion” (侵略 *shinryaku*) to that of “advance” (進出 *shinshutsu*) to describe the entry of Japanese troops into North China in 1937. The *Asahi Shimbun* later acknowledged that the report was wrong. The Japanese government, however, has maintained the clause on “Respect for neighboring countries in Asia on history issues.”

¹⁴ Jungmin Seo, “Politics of Memory in Korea and China, Remembering the Comfort Women and the Nanjing Massacre,” *New Political Science*, vol. 30, No. 3, September 2008.

¹⁵ « Liberté pour l'Histoire, une pétition pour l'abrogation des articles de loi contraignant la recherche et l'enseignement de cette discipline », *Libération*, 13-12-2005, on http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2005/12/13/liberte-pour-l-histoire_541669.

¹⁶ “Comité de vigilance face aux usages publics de l'Histoire”, <http://cvuh.blogspot.jp/>.

recognize the positive role of the French presence overseas, particularly in North Africa.¹⁷ In 2008, at the annual conference *Les Rendez-vous de l'Histoire de Blois*, the historian Pierre Nora also denounced “the discourses of repentance and contrition based on 2000 years of Christian guilt and the systematic disqualification of France”.¹⁸

More recently, in a radio program devoted to historical questions and Baccalaureate preparation for high school students, a historian corrected the term “crime against humanity” to qualify the Algerian War, reclassifying it as a “war crime”.¹⁹ During the electoral campaign for the 2017 presidential election, the same use of the term “crime against humanity” applied to the Algerian War by the candidate Emmanuel Macron on the occasion of a visit to Algiers also aroused much criticism.

It is this same type of debate on the most controversial historical issues, expressed in almost the same terms, neither more nor less revisionist than in France, and confronted by the same criticisms, that also exists in today’s Japan, be it the denunciation of a “masochistic view of history”, or the lobbying actions of the Nihon Kaigi (日本会議), that militates for a more “positive” presentation of Japan’s role in history textbooks.

On another level, Tokyo, like Paris, faces the same criticism concerning the use of archives and the same rejection by former victims of the concept of “objectivity” applied to issues such as the slave trade, the colonial period, the exactions committed during the Second World War in Asia, and the wars of decolonization. In France, movements like “Les indigènes de la République” reject the validity of this concept of objectivity. The Taubira Act on the slave trade also encourages the use of oral sources collected in Africa to “balance” written sources in European archives. In Asia, Chinese historians denounce joint history committees focused on the analysis of archives, and the positivist concept of “Rankean”.²⁰ According to these historians, the opening of archives encouraged by the Japanese government qualifies as “archival hegemony”, and does not compensate for the alleged silence on “alternative narratives”. Positivism is thus denounced as a means of perpetuating historical injustice and avoiding the ethical and political nature of history problems.²¹

Treatment of the Colonial Past in French and Japanese High School History Curricula

With regard to Japan, the controversy over the teaching of the colonial past and the Second World War focused on the authorization, in 2005, of a new history textbook that lacked historical rigor and reduced the importance dedicated to the most controversial episodes like the Nanking Massacre.²² However, this textbook has been adopted by less than 1% of secondary schools, and

¹⁷ Gilles Manceron, op.cit.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *La Fabrique de l'Histoire*, 8-05-2017, France culture.

²⁰ “Rankean” comes from the name of the German historian Leopold von Ranke whose works on “historical objectivity” were introduced in Japan in 1869. Hai Guo, “The Use and Abuse of Rankean Positivism in the Sino-Japanese History Problem, the Japan-China Joint History Research as a Case Study”, *East-Asian Workshop Net Research Center for East Asian Studies*, Madrid, 21-04 -2017.

²¹ Ibid.

²² 新しい歴史教科書 (Atarashii rekishi kyoukasho, *New History of Japan*), Jiyusha, 2015 (reprint).

it is very far from characteristic of the mainstream of history teaching in Japan.²³

In fact, the teaching of the colonial period and the Second World War in Japan, including its most dramatic dimensions, developed as early as the late 1970s, before this type of subject was introduced in French textbooks. The different organization of history teaching in Japan and in France makes comparisons difficult, particularly in terms of the volume devoted to each historical period but - within the limits of the programs - these issues, including the mention of “comfort women”, have been covered in Japan for several decades. In the 1980s, all history textbooks mentioned the massacre of civilians by the Imperial Army in Nanjing. Differences concerned the number of victims, some textbooks following the official claims of the PRC, others choosing to mention the uncertainties and divergences that persist between historians on this issue.²⁴

In France, history programs are devised at the level of the Ministry of Education and involve several external parties, such as teachers' unions, associations of historians, and advocacy groups. The school curriculum thus constitutes a very important political and symbolic issue.²⁵ Until the early 1980s, the history curriculum published in 1957, whose chronology stopped in 1945, remained in place.²⁶ The Algerian War did not become part of history programs before 1983. As a result, according to a survey conducted in 1980, middle school students had “never heard of the war in Algeria.”²⁷ However, the importance of the Algerian War in history programs increased considerably and, since the reform of 2015, the Algerian War can also be considered a subject for the Baccalaureate, which was not the case before.²⁸

This growing importance attributed to the teaching of the Algerian War in France can partly be explained by the ambition to adapt the teaching of history to the changes in middle and high school demographics since the beginning of the 1980s. The need to adjust to a new electoral sociology, and adapt the “memory issues” to classes with a very high proportion of students whose parents came from North Africa, played a role in this evolution. In a report to the Ministry of National Education published in 1983, René Girault suggests that the Ministry “tackle this delicate problem, in order to adapt to a growing number of pupils from immigrant families”.²⁹ According to the historian Pierre Nora, “the public education system found in repentance a new

²³ Tan Weilu, *The Forgotten History: The Book Controversy and Sino-Japanese Relations*, Bachelor of Arts, University of Pittsburgh, 2009. In Japan, the choice of textbooks is based on a system of authorization ex post by the Ministry of Education. The guidelines mention that “all children must be taught about Japan’s historical relationship with its Asian neighbors and the catastrophic damages caused by World War II to humanity at large”. The focus is on the pacifist orientation of Japan after the war. In France, the Ministry of Education publishes a priori very detailed outline programs that authors of history books and publishing houses must follow. The Ministry also influences the writing of history books through the choice of possible subjects of examinations for the Baccalaureate. The Algerian War became a possible subject in 2015.

²⁴ Chien-Peng Chung, op.cit.

²⁵ Patricia Legris, « Les programmes d’histoire en France : la construction progressive d’une citoyenneté plurielle (1980-2010) », *Histoire de l’éducation*, 126-2010.

²⁶ « Programme d’histoire de l’enseignement du second degré, arrêté du 19 juillet 1957 », JORF, 30 juillet 1957. Evelyne Héry, *Un siècle de leçons d’histoire 1870-1970*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1999.

²⁷ Philippe Salson, op.cit.

²⁸ *La fabrique de l’Histoire*, op.cit. For instance, the violent repression that left 8 people dead and hundreds of wounded during a demonstration organized by the Communist Party against the Algerian War at the Charonne metro station in 1962 is now one of the main teaching points on the Algerian War in high schools.

²⁹ René Girault, *L’histoire et la géographie en question, rapport au ministère de l’éducation nationale*, Service d’information du Ministère de l’éducation nationale, Paris, 1983.

mission”.³⁰

But if the Algerian War is now taught in France, and taught in a more and more thorough way because of the ambition to meet the alleged expectations of this new population of immigrant origin, the memory issues related to controversial subjects were not easily managed. The denomination of “Algerian War” for instance is very recent. Until a decision by the National Assembly in 1999, despite the fact that the war mobilized more than 250,000 men, the official denomination remained “law enforcement operations”.³¹

Concerning the exactions committed during the Algerian War, the Act of December 3, 1979 on the opening of archives stipulates that “the national archives concerning private life, national defense and State security will not be opened for 60 years”, thus impeding for an extended period historical research based on archives on one of the most controversial periods in the colonial history of France.³²

On May 8, 1945, the day of the liberation of France, a demonstration denounced as an “insurrection” by Paris took place in Algeria, in the city of Setif. The repression of this demonstration produced several thousand, or tens of thousands, of victims, depending on the sources. According to a resolution adopted by the Paris Council in 2015, the victims were “arrested, tortured and executed summarily”.³³ Despite the importance of the event, however, it was only in 2015 that, for the first time, a French minister visited Algeria to “honor the victims of the Setif massacre, on behalf of the Franco-Algerian friendship”.³⁴

This commemoration, and the treatment of the Setif massacre, has given rise to critics very similar to those that can be found in Japan on the most controversial historical issues. Movements of veterans of the Algerian War and historians have denounced the exaggerated figures of victims endorsed by the Algerian authorities, and Laurent Wauquiez, Secretary General of the UMP, criticized a system of “one-way repentance” and deplored the loss of “national pride” in the treatment of history in France. These positions have provoked debates, but they have not been systematically condemned in the name of anti-revisionism, as some Japanese debates on the same issues and the teaching of history can be.

The Comfort Women Issue in Korea and Military Prostitution in Colonial France: a Significant Difference in Treatment

The issue of military prostitution, particularly in times of war, is another example of the difference in treatment between Japan and France. In Japan, Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono's statement on comfort women, which has not been abandoned, serves as a basis for the teaching of this subject that remains controversial but is not taboo.³⁵

In France, on the other hand, the question of military prostitution (bordels militaires de campagne or BMC) is not mentioned in school textbooks, although they constituted an important

³⁰ Gilles Manceron, op.cit.

³¹ Philippe Salson, op.cit.

³² The usual period is 30 years. Loi du 3 décembre 1979, décret 79-1038 in Philippe Salson, op.cit.

³³ « Massacre de Sétif, l'autre face du 8 mai 1945 », *Le Figaro.fr*, 07-05-2015. According to official Algerian sources (Front de Libération Nationale, FLN) more than 45,000 people were killed; according to French sources, the number of victims was 3000 to 8000, and the killing of about hundred French nationals is also mentioned.

³⁴ « Un ministre français rend hommage aux victimes du massacre de Sétif », *Le Point.fr*, 19-04-2015.

³⁵ 慰安婦関係調査結果発表に関する河野内閣官房長官談話 (Ianfu kankei chōsa kekka happyō ni kansuru Kōno Naikaku Kanbō Chōkan danwa, Statement of the Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono about the results of the investigation into the “comfort women”), <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/taisen/kono.html>, 04-08-1993.

element of France's colonial policy.³⁶ Contrary to the claims of a group of Western historians who denounce the “specific nature” of the Japanese system because of its “large scale, systematic management under the military, and its exploitation of young, poor and vulnerable women in areas colonized or occupied by Japan”, the organization of these “comfort stations” were very similar in France, including the involvement of the army.³⁷

In the French colonies, the system subsisted into the 1960s, although officially the Marthe Richard law had banned brothels in France as early as 1946.³⁸ Local women were enrolled in the BMC in the colonies. A kind of public service delegation was granted by the military to local brothel keepers, in charge of the recruitment of prostitutes, many of them very young and vulnerable, the objective being to impose medical controls to fight the transmission of venereal diseases.³⁹ These women then followed the troops, and the colonial armies stipulated regulations and specific rates.⁴⁰

The same phenomenon also existed in the Republic of Korea after the Korean War where, despite the official prohibition of prostitution after 1945, a system of comfort stations had also been established near US bases. In January 2017, a court in Seoul acknowledged that “some women were trafficked but it is impossible to conclude that the victims did not engage in their own free will”, a decision that recalls the Japanese government's position on comfort women.⁴¹

It is true that one can observe a cross-movement that sees difficult issues such as the Algerian War taking a larger place in the secondary education curriculum in France since the late 1980s, while at the same time the analogous place of World War II in Japan has generally diminished. However, France and Japan do face similar problems in the treatment of painful and controversial historical subjects. In spite of these similarities, there is nevertheless a very important difference between the French situation, where debates are permitted, and where the independent work of historians is recognized as legitimate, and Japan, where debates on the freedom of the historian are called into question, with a hostile position of denouncing the “rise of nationalism” and “revisionism” of the Japanese authorities having been fairly systematically adopted in Western countries as well as in the PRC and in Korea.

This difference in treatment can be explained in part by the sometime clumsiness of the communication policy of the Japanese authorities. However, it can also be explained by a lack of real knowledge of the history of Asia in general, and of Japan in particular, in Western countries. Japan is therefore perceived as a distant and fantasized object, allowing the expression of judgements disconnected from reality. Nevertheless, this difference in treatment is mostly

³⁶ Mustapha El Qadéry, « Femmes de bordels militaires de campagne, les BMC de l'armée coloniale française au Maroc » in M. Peraldi, *Des femmes sur les routes*, sur http://www.gremmo.mom.fr/pdf/conf1/El_Qadery02.pdf.

³⁷ *Open Letter in Support of Historians of Japan*, on https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/japan-scholars-statement-2015.5.4-eng_0.pdf

³⁸ France did not sign the December 2, 1949 “Convention of the United Nations for the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Prostitution” until 1960 because of the continuation of military prostitution in its colonies. Japan signed the Convention in 1958.

³⁹ Jean-Marc Binot, *Le repos des guerriers, les BMC pendant la guerre d'Indochine*, Fayard, Paris, 2014.

⁴⁰ Mustapha El Qadery, op.cit.

⁴¹ Jeff Kingston, “Comfort Women in South Korea Who Serviced US Forces Seek Justice”, *Japan Times*, 04-03-2017; Sara Soh, *The Comfort Women, Sexual Violence in Post-Colonial Memory years in Korea and Japan*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009. In the case of Korea, the issue was complicated by the collaboration of Korean elites during the colonization period, and the participation of local brothel keepers or “private interests” in the recruitment of “comfort women”; see Jungmin Seo, “Politics of Memory in Korea and in China: Remembering the Comfort Women and the Nanjing Massacre,” *New Political Science*, vol. 30, No. 3, September 2008.

explained by the important differences in the political-strategic context between France and Japan.

The Weight of History Between France and Algeria, and among the PRC, Korea and Japan

The question of the use of history for political motives is very present in Algeria, where the Algerian War and the anti-colonial struggle are an integral part of the strategy of legitimacy of the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale). The constant reminder of a difficult past has also been integrated into Algeria's negotiating strategy with regard to France.⁴²

But if the Algerian authorities may be tempted to build their legitimacy and increase their leverage against the former colonial power by mobilizing the memory of war and past exactions, the weight of Algeria - and its influence - on the international scene remains limited.

In the case of Japan, the situation differs greatly with the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the People's Republic of China (PRC), two powers that - for different reasons - have transformed historical issues and anti-Japanese nationalism into a fundamental element of their strategies for legitimacy and influence.

The case of Korea approximates to some extent the case of Algeria in its relationship with France, and history as a motivation is basically related to internal politics. History became the central field of political struggle in Korea in the context of the transition to democracy in the late 1980s.⁴³ It is from this time that the issue of comfort women took on a growing importance. The new freedom of speech and the rise of feminism and liberal political parties were important factors in this evolution.

The issue of comfort women in Korea thus played an important role in building a new political and national identity against the military dictatorship and the elites who collaborated with the Japanese colonial authorities and remained in place after 1945. The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Sexual Slavery by Japan, established in 1990, also played an important role in obstructing any questioning of the official position on the question of comfort women as "sexual slaves of the Imperial Army". In particular, any analysis that tried to take into account the position of women in Korean society, and the role of Korean "private actors" in recruiting prostitutes for the Japanese forces, could be condemned.⁴⁴

In the case of the PRC, there is a double dimension. The first is related to the internal legitimacy of the Communist Party after 1989, with the establishment of patriotic education campaigns in 1991, and the emergence of a new nationalism with a strong anti-Japanese component during the 1990s.

The second dimension is strategic and its objective remains to prohibit the return of Japan as a normal and legitimate power on the international scene. This second dimension has an international propaganda dimension that strongly influences perceptions of Japan, particularly in the West.⁴⁵

⁴² For instance, according to an agreement signed in 1982, France accepted to pay for Algerian gas at a price more than 25% above the world market price. Regarding visas, residency visas and work permits have been required for Algerian nationals since 1994, but no accommodation certificate of conformity is required for members of their immediate families, unlike other nationalities.

⁴³ Jungmin Seo, *op.cit.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ In Asia, including in countries that suffered from Japanese colonization (Taiwan) or occupation during the war (South-East Asia), the perception of Japan is today extremely positive. As in the case of relations between France and West Germany during the Cold War, this positive appreciation can also be explained by a common strategic preoccupation regarding the increasing assertiveness of the PRC in the region.

One of the main objectives of the propaganda apparatus of the Chinese Communist Party is therefore to prohibit any right to historical research for Japan. For example, an “Association for the Safeguarding of Historical Facts” has been established by a Chinese national in the United States that claims to “seek apologies, more compensation and to petition against Japan’s attempt to join the UNSC”.⁴⁶ It should be noted also that, in 2005, the first massive anti-Japanese demonstrations in China, officially justified by popular indignation after the authorization of a new history textbook by Tokyo, were in fact related to the proposed reform of the UN Security Council that could have opened the possibility for countries such as Japan, India or Germany to be accepted as permanent members. The PRC rejected absolutely that perspective, not on moral grounds but because it would have balanced the influence of Beijing on the international scene as a “global power”. For the Chinese regime, history is thus very directly an instrument integrated into a multidimensional strategy that does not leave room for reconciliation and forgiveness with a former enemy whose main value, for the Chinese regime, resides in that status.

This prohibition of the right to history for Japan is thus also based on the fact that, for the Chinese leadership, control of history and the rejection of any historical debates is also a tool in the context of the balance of power with Tokyo. In that specific strategic context, the Nanjing Massacre became an issue quite recently in the PRC, and it is fully related to the emergence of anti-Japanese nationalism since the 1990s. In 1937, Nanjing was the capital of the Kuomintang nationalist regime, illegitimate in the eyes of the Communist Party. Thus, the Nanjing Massacre is not mentioned in any of Mao Zedong's writings. On the contrary, Mao Zedong rejoiced at his meeting with Premier Tanaka in 1972 about the Sino-Japanese War, which had allowed the Communist Party to take power in 1949.

Since the 1990s, however, a new “commemorative” movement has emerged in the PRC, accompanied by the construction or renovation of museums devoted to the “war of resistance against Japan”. But this multiplication of memorials, specifically directed against Japan, and the constant reminder of the war on Chinese TV, also aims to compensate for the taboos that remain in place concerning the historical tragedies caused by the Chinese Communist Party since 1949.⁴⁷

In the case of the Nanjing Massacre, the claim to the exclusive control of history by the PRC is expressed through the interdiction on discussing the official figure of the number of victims, 300,000, engraved in eleven languages at the entrance of the Nanjing Massacre Memorial restored in 2007. No historical research on the nature and scope of the massacre is allowed, and the work of non-Chinese historians adopting a more scientific perspective is systematically denounced.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Memory issues are common to all colonial powers who have committed abuses in controlled territories. This is particularly the case in France and in Japan, confronted with complex issues that affect the very identity of the nation. We find in both cases the same difficulty in addressing certain issues, the same necessity to shed light on the past, the same issues concerning education but also the same debates about the legitimacy of the growing weight of historical memories and

⁴⁶ Chang Jun, “Ding Yuan: Safeguarding Historical Truth”, *China Daily* 24-10-2014.

⁴⁷ According to conservative figures, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution in China caused more than 35 million deaths. See, Frank Dikötter’s trilogy: *The Tragedy of Liberation*, 2013, *Mao’s Great Famine*, 2010, and *The Cultural Revolution*, 2016.

⁴⁸ Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism, Pride, Politics and Diplomacy*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2004.

repentance.

However, if in the case of France these debates are considered legitimate, in the case of Japan, questioning of the official Chinese or Korean postures is immediately condemned as a manifestation of historical revisionism. While in France, the manipulation of history by undemocratic regimes such as that in Algeria is an object of criticism, in Japan's case, the position of the Chinese authorities on historical issues, and the systematic denunciation of "Japanese nationalism", are often accepted without hesitation, in spite of the fact that the motivations of the Chinese regime are in reality related to issues of legitimacy and the contemporary strategic balance of power much more than to history.

The German example, and that of Franco-German reconciliation, is often mentioned. However, if reconciliation has been possible between France and Germany, it has been both because of the strategic context of the Cold War, and because of the desire of Paris to achieve this reconciliation. Actually, the Franco-German reconciliation and the famous de Gaulle-Adenauer meeting in 1958 happened long before any process of repentance in West Germany.⁴⁹

In Asia, only a fundamental change in what constitutes the foundations of the political system in China - and probably in Korea - could allow the emergence of a more consensual and balanced dialogue on history. If this development does not occur, if Japan's position is systematically criticized and misunderstood by its Western allies, one can only fear that, in response to constant Chinese pressure, a hostile and more radical reaction could also develop in the Japanese public and some political constituencies.

⁴⁹ Discussion of the Nazi past in West Germany, and of the role of former Nazi officials, including those involved in the "Final Solution", did not begin before the end of the 1970s.